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Report of a high level seminar on global assessments and peer reviews – follow-up and next steps

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This document presents the outcomes of the high level seminar on global assessments and peer reviews, held in Alushta, Ukraine, on 25-27 June 2013. The seminar addressed key findings and good practices concerning the institutional organization of national statistical systems and their capacity to produce and disseminate official statistics according to international and European Union standards. The aim was to share experience on the implementation of improvement recommendations related to the institutional environment and evaluate the programme through exchange of views among participating countries, experts and donors.

This document is submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for information.

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I. Introduction

1. This high level seminar was jointly organized and funded by the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Eurostat and UNECE with the objective to take stock of all the (adapted) Global Assessments and (light) Peer Reviews conducted in the various regions and countries, to discuss their outcomes and benefits and to identify future action and modalities of further assessments. It brought together for the first time in the area of statistics very different regions; the Western Balkans, Turkey, Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) including Mongolia as well as the Non-European Mediterranean countries. The overall purpose of the seminar was to exchange experiences, learn from each other and identify the way ahead to follow-up the current round of assessments. This seminar was a continuation of a similar event in Yalta in 2009 that discussed global assessments for the eastern European, Caucasus and Central Asian countries and presented the kick-off of the process of the 2009-2013 round of (adapted) Global Assessments and (light) Peer Reviews.

2. A peer review focuses on the compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice while a global assessment focuses on the United Nations (UN) Fundamental principles of official statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice and also evaluates statistical domains as well as their compliance with international and European standards. The evaluation of compliance with standards and principles during the adapted global assessments and light peer reviews for the Western Balkans, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine was made with an emphasis on the European standards in statistics. The legal basis for this are the Stabilisation and Association Agreements for the Western Balkans, the Accession Partnership for Turkey and the Association Agreements for the five East European neighborhood countries, by which these countries took on the commitment to gradually approximate to European legislation in their statistical production.

II. The objectives of the seminar

3. The objectives of the seminar were the following:

(a) Present the procedures and processes for the various types of assessments, be it global assessments or peer reviews and their commonalities and differences;

(b) Receive feedback from the countries on the benefits and challenges of the assessments;

(c) Review and learn from each other on good practices identified during the assessments;

(d) Discuss recommendations along the lines of the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the European Statistics Code of Practice, in particular regarding the institutional environment of a statistical office, quality, production processes and dissemination;

(e) Exchange experience on existing good practices and ways of implementing the improvement recommendations;

(f) Discuss the usefulness and impact of assessments for the further development of a statistical office and a national statistical system;

(g) Reflect on the way forward in implementing different types of assessments in the future.

III. Scope of participation

4. The high level seminar brought together about 70 participants and speakers from the national statistical offices of Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Libya, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan as well as from Statistics Norway and Statistics Sweden, Eurostat, UNECE Statistical Division, EFTA Statistical Office, Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), the World Bank, the Eurasian Economic Commission and three experts who had been involved in the assessments.

IV. Conclusions

5. The high level seminar can be considered a success because it encouraged and promoted the exchange of experiences and good practices between the different countries and regions and identified the way forward in supporting the countries in the implementation of the improvement recommendations and in applying different types of assessments, as relevant and feasible. The following text presents the conclusions that can be drawn from the three-day seminar.

A. Review of implementation

6. Most of the countries present had already undergone one or the other type of assessment.

7. Those who have not yet had an assessment received a concrete introduction to what an assessment is, what it can be used for, what is needed to prepare for it and what could be a good timing to request it.

8. The process of the different types of assessments was reviewed and good practices / success stories were identified such as the revision of the statistical law, dissemination practices, improvements on the website, coordination of the national statistical system, introduction of a more systematic quality management, etc.

9. The benefits of assessments and recommendations were recognized and promoted by the countries. The impact of these assessments on their statistical system and the broader institutional environment were also highlighted.

10. Most of the countries have integrated the recommendations for improvement (improvement actions) into their statistical strategies and long-term and annual work programmes and have started implementing the improvement actions. Many already demonstrated with tangible results the feasibility of implementing the recommendations. It was acknowledged that the recommendations are of different scope and nature and some need more effort and persuasiveness to be implemented than others.

11. The exchange on how the recommendations can be implemented, what kind of challenges this poses to the different stakeholders and how these challenges can be overcome has already proved to be very fruitful and will continue to allow learning from each other.

12. It has been recognised that there is no silver bullet to the implementation of recommendations, but that it has to be adapted to the background and context of each country. The exchange of approaches and solutions will continue on different occasions, during missions or meetings in the countries.

B. Monitoring and support

13. Eurostat, together with UNECE, has started the process of monitoring the implementation of the improvement actions in the assessed countries. For the Western Balkans and Turkey this process was set-up in 2012 and is on-going whereas for the EECCA countries this process will be reviewed on the occasion of the next high level seminar in Vilnius in September 2013, organised by Eurostat.

14. Annual monitoring of implementation allows the senior management of national statistical offices to have an overview of the state of implementation, achievements and challenges, and to understand the remaining problems, while for international organisations the monitoring results help to identify possible areas for technical assistance.

15. Implementation of the improvement recommendations will be supported by the international organizations through projects, advocacy or other means. Countries are encouraged to address the implementation of improvement actions in donor projects, twinning projects or other kinds of support mechanisms.

16. Eurostat, UNECE and EFTA stand ready to support the countries in promoting the recommendations from the reports to the different stakeholders in the national statistical system and beyond, and to promote the assessments as well as the underlying principles of official statistics, as needed.

C. Outlook

17. For the way forward, four different kinds of assessment were identified, each of them being applied only upon request by the countries:

(a) Normal global assessments, five years after the last assessment at the earliest;

(b) Shorter / focused assessments addressing the state of implementation of the recommendations (based on the annual monitoring launched by Eurostat and UNECE), areas with identified shortcomings and any other issue that may arise in the meantime;

(c) Sectoral assessments focusing in-depth on a specific statistical domain;

(d) Peer reviews assessing the compliance with the principles of the European Statistic Code of Practice applying the methodology used for the EU Member States.

18. It was suggested to include experts from recently assessed NSIs in the assessment teams for other countries in order to build-up experience and exchange knowledge among peers with the same background and coming from similar systems.

19. The follow-up of specific challenges, problems and practices in the regions will be ensured in the meetings for different groups of countries:

(a) For the Western Balkans and Turkey (EU enlargement countries) in the Policy Group for Statistical Cooperation organised by Eurostat;

(b) For the EECCA countries and Mongolia in various high level seminars such as the one for the European Neighbourhood Policy East (ENP East) and Central Asia countries organised by Eurostat, or the events of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asian countries (SPECA) organised by UNECE;

(c) For the non-European Mediterranean countries (European Neighbourhood Policy South countries, ENP South) in the meetings of the Euro-Med Forum organised by Eurostat.